

Article 36 statement, Laura Boillot

CCW informal meeting on lethal autonomous weapons systems

13 May 2014, Geneva

Thank you Mr. Chair.

On behalf of Article 36, I would like to make a few remarks on the areas that we consider key to discussions on autonomous weapons systems, as well as to lay out some of our expectations for this week.

First, we would like to thank you, Ambassador, and your team for convening the first round of government discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems. Whilst there has been steady concern raised over autonomous weapons systems over the past several years by organisations, academics and other experts, as well as the launch last year of the *Campaign to Stop Killer Robots* of which Article 36 is a founding member, it is promising that this issue is now being taken up by governments.

Our main concern is that weapons systems may be developed that would operate without meaningful human control.

In current practice there is an expectation that human control is exercised over when weapons are used, where they are used and how they are used, as well as over their effects. This is implicit in existing international law governing the use of force. So, clearly, deploying autonomous weapons systems outside of any kind of human control is neither ethically nor legally acceptable.

Increasingly however, autonomous weapons systems may erode what we have come to expect in terms of human control over weapons. Whilst there seems to be broad agreement that the operation of weapons systems must remain under some sort of human control, the key is to explain how this 'human control' is

understood, and to delineate the nature of human control that must be present for the use of a weapon system to be acceptable.

It is our view that, as a first principle for addressing concerns regarding autonomous weapons systems, states should formulate as an explicit legal requirement that there be meaningful human control over individual attacks.

In that regard, the CCW meeting of experts offers an important opportunity for government delegations to:

- Reaffirm that meaningful human control must be exercised over the use of weapons, and express concern over future weapons that could operate without meaningful human control;
- Explain how human control is exercised over existing weapons systems, especially those termed “automatic” or “semi-autonomous”, and, where applicable, explain how present practice informs states’ policy orientation towards autonomous weapons in the future;
- Where applicable, explain how ‘human control’, or its equivalent, is defined in relevant national policies, and finally
- Support the development of an explicit prohibition, under international humanitarian law, of weapons systems operating without meaningful human control over individual attacks.

We hope that this week, states will make good progress on starting discussions on this issue, with the aim to work towards agreeing a mandate in November this year to formally start work on this issue. Ultimately, we would like to see states working to negotiate a new international legal instrument that would establish a positive obligation for meaningful human control over individual attacks, and by doing so, prohibit weapons systems operating without the necessary human control.

We have further elaborated our thinking on this issue in a paper that Article 36 has produced for this meeting that will be available at the back of the room and on our website, entitled “key areas for debate on autonomous weapons systems”.

This paper is an updated version of a paper we distributed last November. We welcome your views on this and we look forward to an active exchange on the many issues raised by autonomous weapons systems over the next few days. This meeting is an important opportunity for States Parties to the CCW to shape our orientation toward the role of computers and machines in human violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

